

Elite Armor Unit: Hell's Hammers

Introduction

Formed during the closing stages of the Clone Wars from armor units of the Old Republic, Hell's Hammers have served the Empire in a large number of actions in the Outer Rim Territories. Used initially to crush opposition to the New Order, Hell's Hammers are now engaged in eradicating Rebel outposts, subjugating planets with Rebel sympathies, and in forcibly bringing reluctant worlds into the Empire.

Originally created as a regiment, losses suffered in countless campaigns have reduced the unit's strength to little more than a battalion. Even so, Hell's Hammers continues to strike fear into all who oppose the Emperor's will.

Often working in tandem with stormtrooper strike teams, the Hammers are frequently deployed to crack open the outer defenses of Rebel outposts. They clear a path into a base by brushing aside Rebel ground troops, eradicating gun emplacements, and shooting down enemy airspeeders and low flying starfighters. Stormtroopers or regular Army troops are then able to enter the confines of a base directly from their transports.

The Hammers have also seen action in more traditional armor engagements, where they are used to spearhead assaults into enemy-held territory. Equipped with the most powerful repulsortanks in the Empire, the Hammers are capable of destroying or over-powering most of the ground-based opposition they encounter.

Being able to travel fast, the Hammers are a hard-hitting assault force with a reputation for getting results at any cost -- a reputation that they well deserve, for their long history is not free from the taste of defeat.

On more than one occasion the Hammers have been thrown against superior forces without effective backup. In all of these cases the Hammers achieved their initial objective, but the lack of adequate infantry support made it impossible for them to maintain their position.

The action on Turak IV, while being marked as the Hammers' worst defeat, is also a great source of pride to the unit. Here two battalions of the Hammers' tanks swept across the lava plains to capture the Rebel Army's forward positions. But, because of the incompetence of General Maltaz, commander of the Imperial Army on Turak IV, they were cut off by Rebel forces counter-attacking from hidden bases high in the volcanic Hitak mountains.

General Maltaz ordered the Hammers to hold their position, and attempted to halt the Rebel advance with the remainder of his command. Heavily outnumbered and subject to concentrated attacks by armored Rebel speeders, starfighters and ground forces, the Hammers suffered heavy losses. Even though their tanks were soon burning fiercely in the hot sulfurous air, the Hammers refused to give ground. By the time the order came to withdraw, there were few Hammers left to receive it. All that remained were three tanks. The rest of the once-mighty force had been turned into smoldering hulks. The two battalions had almost ceased to exist.

Even though two battalions were effectively destroyed, their tank crews did not die in vain. TIE fighter patrols, which flew over the area in the closing stages of the campaign, reported large numbers of Rebel vehicles and starfighters lying strewn across the plains in front of the Hammers' position. The Hammers had paid a high price, but the cost to the Rebel Alliance was even higher. The Hammers had indeed lived up to their motto of "Strike To Kill".

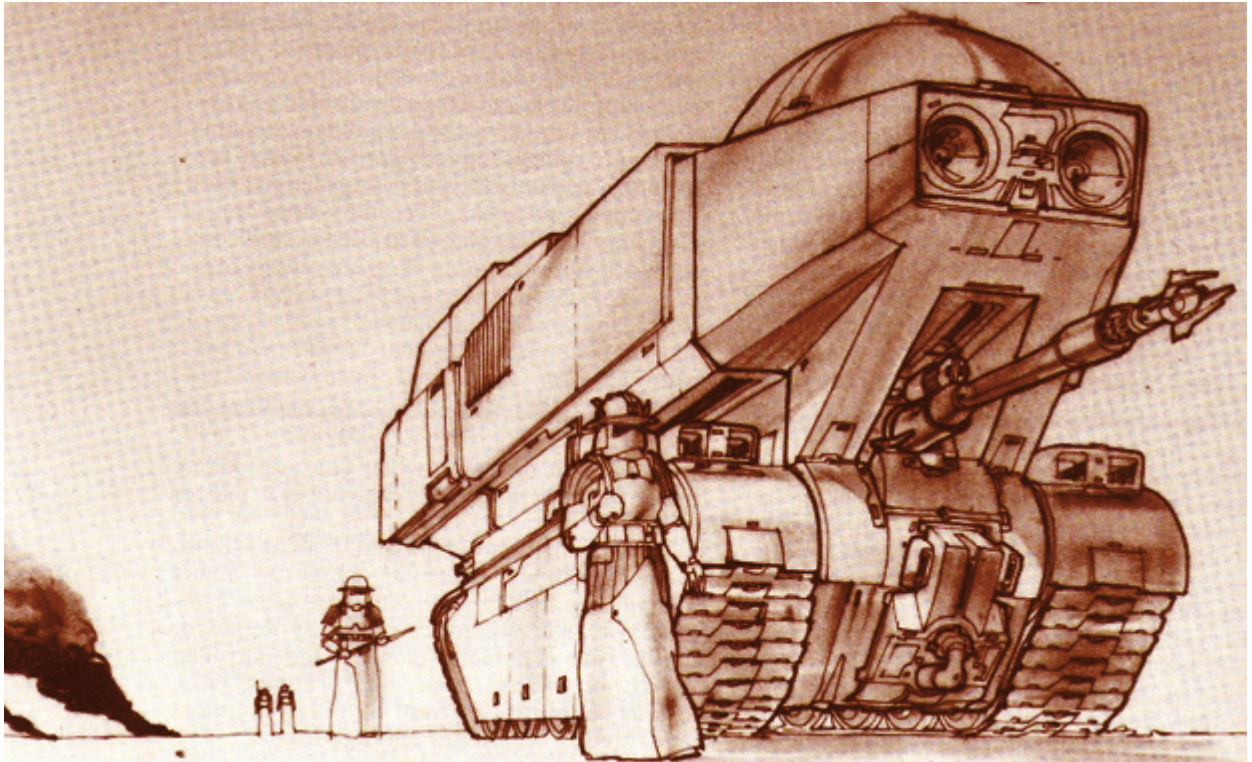
Since that fateful day, the Hammers have operated under strength, with only one battalion able to take the field. While this has reduced the fighting ability of the unit, it has also served to increase its morale. The remaining troops of the unit have an uncanny knack for surviving engagement after engagement. Always bearing the brunt of the assaults, the Hammers have surprised Imperial Command with their ability to keep on going in the face of overwhelming odds.

Once considered an expendable force, the Hammers are now viewed as an essential part of Imperial Command's strategy in the Outer Rim Territories. This position has been attained at a high price as the blood of the unit's tankers has often been spilt unnecessarily by incompetent Imperial officers.

The unit's commander, Colonel "Rancor" Johans, is using the growing prominence of the Hammers to further increase his standing in the Imperial Army. Colonel Johans's proven tactical ability, and the complete devotion of his troops, has enabled him to persuade Imperial command that the Hammers should be allowed more freedom when it comes to campaigns.

Following the successful subjugation of the Yatir, a humanoid race indigenous to Absit and sympathetic to the Rebel Alliance, Johans has been able to convince Imperial Command that the Hammers would be of far more use to the Empire if they were again restored to regimental strength. To this end, intensive training of recruits is now taking place on Brintooine to build the Hammers back up to regimental strength.

Hell's Hammers are destined to play a major role in the Empire's war against the Rebel Alliance.



Organization

Hell's Hammers form an elite force within the Imperial Army. When at full strength, the regiment consists of three battalions and a regimental command group. Two battalions are used to spearhead assaults, with the third battalion being held in reserve to reinforce the front line units as required, or be deployed as the situation warrants.

As the unit is currently under strength, it operates without a reserve, relying on the abilities of its troopers to gain its objectives quickly and effectively. This self-reliance and the growing autonomy of the unit within the Imperial command structure has helped maintain the unit's already high morale. The troopers look to each other and to Colonel "Rancor" Johans, rather than to other Imperial units, for support in times of need.

The experience on Turak IV has led the unit to act independently whenever possible, preferring to plan its own actions rather than catering to the logistical concerns of Imperial Command. If the Hammers were not so successful, this attitude would not be tolerated. But Johans's inspired leadership has led the unit to victory after victory, a state of affairs which Imperial Command is only too happy to accept.

Battalion Organization

The battalion consists of the battalion command and three armor troops, backed up by a reconnaissance troop. The three armor troops are employed to break through and capture enemy positions, relying on the mighty repulsorlift tanks to achieve their objectives. The reconnaissance troop serves a dual role: to probe enemy positions, and to protect the flanks of the armor troops during advances.

Each armor troop is led by a captain and consists of four squadrons. A squadron contains four repulsortanks led by a lieutenant and is the smallest unit employed by the Hammers. Depending on the situation, squadrons may operate independently of their troops or be massed together with other troops to literally "hammer" through enemy defenses.

The tanks are crewed by highly-trained troopers led by a sergeant. The crew is equipped with helmets containing wide-spectrum viewfinders, passive infrared sensors, and computer-linked fire control targeting sensors. Although the tank crews are not expected to fight outside of their tanks, they are equipped with blaster carbines and pistols for defense in the event of a breakdown or being knocked out by enemy fire.

The reconnaissance troop comprises three squadrons of heavily armored airspeeders, and one squadron of fast moving but lightly armored speeder bikes. The reconnaissance squadrons operate independently of each other, allowing them to cover a wider area. The repulsorlift bikes are equipped with a single laser cannon for defense purposes. Their riders are expected to retreat in the face of enemy fire.

Before the armor advances, the reconnaissance troop explores the area ahead reporting on the difficulty of the terrain to be traversed by the tanks, probing enemy positions, and noting the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy. The reconnaissance units are not designed to capture and hold ground. In the event of concerted opposition they are instructed to report on enemy positions and return to the main unit.

When the armor advances, the reconnaissance unit is positioned on the flanks and slightly to the rear of the attack force. In this formation the reconnaissance squadrons are able to keep the armored attack force informed of any enemy troop movements which threaten to cut off the unit or otherwise endanger its advance. In the event of an enemy attack on the flanks, the reconnaissance troop's airspeeder squadrons fight to protect the exposed tanks, but fall back as soon as the armor is able to bring its heavy weapons to bear.

Until the unit is returned to full regimental strength, "Rancor" Johans personally commands the battalion. His command group is therefore larger than would be normally found in a tank battalion. It consists of his personal tank squadron of four vehicles, a communications wagon, and a gun battery.

The gun battery contains four Golan Arms Df .9 Mobile Emplacement Guns, and two Golan Arms Df .1 Spray Blasters. The battery provides fire support and air defense fire for the battalion. The mobile repulsorlift-mounted guns can be rapidly moved into position to protect the battalion during enemy counterattacks, or to add their firepower to the battalion's tanks during advances. The gun battery is a recent addition to the unit, and is indicative of the more independent role that the unit has gained under Johans's leadership.

In addition to the combat troops, the battalion contains 40 support personnel responsible for supplying the unit in the field and for maintaining its equipment. Thirty technicians work on the unit's vehicles, keeping them functioning and repairing battle damage. A group of 10 engineers, equipped with heavy repulsorlift barges, recover disabled and damaged tanks and carry out any field fortifications required.

The unit relies on Imperial starships to carry it from world to world. On arriving in a system, the unit is transported to the planet's surface in armored and shielded landing barges. After landing, the unit quickly moves out to begin its attacks. Usually one of the first units in, the Hammers are also one of the first units to be withdrawn once victory has been assured. This unit, however, gets little rest as it is soon en route to its next assignment.

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